

Identifying Movement of Malaria Parasites One Region to Another to Mitigate Public Health, Force Health Protection Threats

Story Number: NNS171114-18 Release Date: 11/14/2017 2:51:00 PM



From Naval Medical Research Center Public Affairs

BALTIMORE (NNS) -- Researchers from the U.S. Naval Medical Research Center - Asia (NMRC-A) shared findings on the epidemiology of imported malaria cases in Vietnam among returning nationals, at the American Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene (ASTMH) Annual Meeting, Nov. 7.

"The burden of malaria in Vietnam has been significantly reduced in recent years, but the challenges to malaria elimination remain, including drug resistance and the importation of malaria from outside of Vietnam," said Lt. Cmdr. Nicholas Martin, NMRC-A.

According to Martin, drug-resistant malaria, currently confined to Southeast Asia, poses a threat to global health and can be a driver of instability in the region. This research project aims to characterize malaria in Vietnamese patients returning from Africa and determine if they are infected by malaria resistant to current frontline treatments.

"Resistance to anti-malarial drugs threatens to shrink the arsenal of treatments available to the Department of Defense," said Martin. "Malaria, invisible to rapid diagnostic tests, presents a direct threat to the warfighter and to the many tools used by the DoD to detect malaria."

Martin, along with others at NMRC-A, conducted a review study of records gathered at Vietnamese hospitals and identified malaria cases in laborers recently returned to Vietnam from overseas work.

During the study's time frame, a total of 247 malaria patients returned from abroad. According to the study results, the majority of individuals who returned were males with a median age of around 34 years-old who had stayed abroad for an average of more than a year.

Seventy-eight percent of the 247 individuals presented with plasmodium falciparum malaria. Eighty-three percent of these individuals had recently returned from Angola.

"The importation of malaria by Vietnamese nationals returning from work warrants research to understand the epidemiology of these cases and their impact on elimination efforts," said Martin. "Improved understanding of global linkages and their role in re-introducing or sustaining ongoing transmission is crucial for developing and sustaining effective malaria elimination strategies."

The ASTMH Annual Meeting draws tropical medicine and global health professionals representing academia, government, non-profits, philanthropy, non-governmental organizations, industry, military and private practice.

The meeting is designed for researchers, professors, government and public health officials, military personnel, travel clinic physicians, practicing physicians in tropical medicine, students and all healthcare providers working in the fields of tropical medicine, hygiene and global health.

The annual meeting is a five-day educational conference that includes four pre-meeting courses and draws approximately 4,400 attendees.

The Naval Medical Research Center's (NMRC) eight laboratories are engaged in a broad spectrum of activity from basic science in the laboratory to field studies at sites in austere and remote areas of the world, to operational environments.

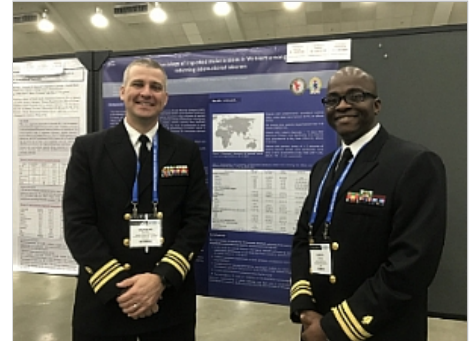
In support of the Navy, Marine Corps, and joint U.S. warfighters, researchers study infectious diseases; biological warfare detection and defense; combat casualty care; environmental health concerns; aerospace and undersea medicine; medical modeling, simulation and operational mission support; and epidemiology and behavioral sciences.

NMRC and the laboratories deliver high-value, high-impact research products to support and protect today's deployed warfighters. At the same time, researchers are focused on the readiness and well-being of future forces.

For more information, visit www.navy.mil, www.facebook.com/usnavy, or www.twitter.com/usnavy.

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Lt. Cmdr. Nicholas Martin, left, stands next to Lt. Cmdr. Gabriel Defang at the American Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene Annual Meeting, November 7. Martin presented findings on identifying the movement of malaria parasites from one region to another to mitigate public health and force health protection threats. (U.S. Navy Photo, Katie Berland, Released)

November 7, 2017

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